

State Supreme Court rejects serial killer Yates' petition

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The state Supreme Court has unanimously rejected an effort by serial killer Robert Yates to overturn his conviction and death sentence.

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The Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — The Washington Supreme Court on Thursday again rejected an effort by serial killer Robert Yates to overturn his convictions and death sentence.

Yates contended he received ineffective counsel during his 2002 trial, in which he received the death penalty. The high court affirmed his convictions and sentence in 2007.

State law requires that so-called personal restraint petitions must come within a year of the judgment and sentence becoming final. Yates waited seven years to file his petition, so the Supreme Court unanimously rejected it as untimely.

In an agreement with prosecutors, Yates pleaded guilty to murdering a total of 13 women in Spokane, Walla Walla and Skagit counties. He was later convicted of murdering two women in Pierce County and sentenced to death for those crimes.

The Supreme Court in 2013 rejected Yates' effort to challenge his death sentence on grounds that included ineffective counsel.

Yates filed his latest petition in 2014, this time claiming his lawyers failed to argue that his trial in Pierce County was improper.

"Yates argues that although the two bodies were found in Pierce County, it is possible that the murders actually occurred in King County," the opinion said.

As part of his latest petition, Yates' lawyers filed declarations stating it never occurred to them to file a motion for improper venue.

But the Supreme Court found Yates' latest petition did not warrant an exception to the one-year rule.

"There is no newly discovered evidence involved in Yates's claim," the opinion said.

"The only thing 'new' here is that Yates's new attorney has a new idea for a claim."

Yates, 63, was an Army veteran who moved with his family to Spokane in the mid-1990s.

From 1996 to 1998, he killed at least 13 women who worked as prostitutes along Spokane's notorious East Sprague Avenue. He buried at least one of his victims outside his bedroom window on Spokane's upscale South Hill.

After his capture, Yates also confessed to two Walla Walla murders in 1975 and a 1988 murder in Skagit County.

He is on death row at the Washington State Penitentiary.